Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You're listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, Editor-in-Chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress, explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators, and decision-makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

Jeff Casimir, Turing School executive director:

Turing at its heart is about civil rights, right? Is blowing open the access doors to who is allowed to have these high quality careers.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Even in the midst of a severe economic downturn. There are thousands of open software engineering jobs across the country, but for people looking to break into the field, it's tough. Most companies want somebody with three to five years experience and more often than not a college degree. Getting that degree can be expensive, creating a barrier to entry to the field for those who can't afford it or who don't want to spend another four years in school. The non-profit Turing School is trying to break down those barriers. Executive Director, Jeff Casimir explains how these programs give students hands-on education. Skills they need to become an engineer and get them their first break in the field right away. It's a seven month immersive program with two different majors and a third coming soon.

Jeff Casimir, Turing School executive director:

One is backend engineering, which is programming and has a little heavier emphasis on data and data structures and making sense of all the data that our applications generate.

Jeff Casimir, Turing School executive director:

The second program is the front-end engineering program. That is a little more user-focused. So it's still very programming heavy, programming and JavaScripts in that case and building the interactive interfaces that we're becoming quickly, very accustomed to and expect all across web applications.

Jeff Casimir, Turing School executive director:

And then this summer, we're going to welcome our first class of a new program, a data analytics program. We are going to be training people to do work in these data teams that most every company is growing now. It's how do you get data from one system to another? How do you translate the data from the email system, combine it with the sales system and bring this all together into ways where you can make meaningful reports and draw conclusions.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Many Turing School students are older than traditional college age. Some may already have an undergrad degree, or they've tried other careers and became dissatisfied with the pay or the prospects Casimir describes what people can expect from its immersive program, which during the pandemic is now online.

Jeff Casimir, Turing School executive director:

Some of the feedback I'm most proud to hear is when alums come back and they say, my job is much easier than Turing. That's how it should be, we try to recreate our in-person experience through Zoom, right? Through Slack, through all the tools that we make use of. We run synchronous events,

synchronous classes. So you have a start time. You know, it's like a meeting you're supposed to be there. You have live instruction. You're asking questions, you're interacting with your peers. We make a lot of use of these features like breakout groups and there's a whole lot of pair and group collaboration in the work because we want the school to operate just like the job does. Folks are generally with us 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM, Monday through Friday, that's Mountain Standard Time. They are in class for a couple hours, usually about three hours a day.

Jeff Casimir, Turing School executive director:

And then second three hours in the afternoon that are often spent in doing their pair and group work, doing check-ins with their instructors, getting feedback on their code and their work, doing planning sessions, professional development, resume building. They might meet with, we have a bunch of what we call circles that are kind of student interest groups. So some of those are identity centric, like for our LGBTQ students, for our students of color, for our veterans, they're just all kinds of different ways to interact with the community. And one of the most important things about the way Turing has always operated and will always continue to operate is that it is antsy competitive. Like this is not a place where it's like, come in and see if you survive and like step on everybody else on your way to the top. It is a model of collective success. Like the individuals do their best when the community does its best. So we put all our effort into what it takes to make the community succeed because then the individuals will succeed.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

The two programs Turing School offers are $20,000 each. A third shorter program will soon be starting at 15,000. That may sound like a lot, but Casimir explains that Turing school students see a return on their investment very quickly.

Jeff Casimir, Turing School executive director:

The typical student pays off their total investment in 18 to 20 months. Their average salary coming out of the program is 75,000 where the average coming in was between like 35 and 42,000. So the value to them is very quick. When we look at the price tag and say like, "Oh yeah, cost 20,000." I think to a lot of people, it's like, "Well, I don't have 20,000." You know, the whole point here was I need a better job. I don't have just 20K in the bank, totally understandable and expected. That's why we've set up a bunch of financial partnerships to get different loans. Almost any student can get a loan at a reasonable rate from one of our loan providers, go through the program, even have money, borrow money for their cost of living during the program, get out, get that awesome job, pay it all off.

Jeff Casimir, Turing School executive director:

I couldn't believe the salary growth that people are seeing two, three, four years after the program. The average salary for people that graduated in 2018, the average salary amongst this reporting group was 107,000. And for so many of our students, that they're the first in their family to earn these kinds of middle-class, upper middle-class salaries. I think the number now of companies who have hired at least one grad is somewhere around 400 companies. The majority of our graduates go into companies that are between maybe 30 and 200 employees.

Jeff Casimir, Turing School executive director:

That's typically a great place for them to land. They get a lot of responsibility, opportunities to learn all those kinds of things. And I think for employers, we're not a charity case. It's not like, "Please take on

some of our students and shepherd them." They're here to do the job. They know what they're doing, they'll get in. And they deliver a high value just as high a value as people will definitely higher value than people coming out of undergrad. But just as high a value as people that have one or two years experience, but don't have as solid or fundamentals as our students do.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Casimir says that the COVID pandemic did hurt the tech job market initially, but it's been recovering well

Jeff Casimir, Turing School executive director:

In Q4, October, November, December, we actually saw more jobs in 2020s Q4 than in 2019s Q4. The tech industry, as it always seems to do is in this exceptional place of privilege where it has rebounded first, there's a lot of investment happening. Venture capital is active in technology. And when venture capitalists invest in a tech company, most of that money goes into labor. When a company takes venture capital, they're supposed to hire people and get to work as soon as they possibly can. And so in October, November, December, a lot of venture capital investments were happening. And now we're seeing that play out in the job market.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Casimir knows the tech field is not as diverse as it should be. He explains how Turing School encourages black, Latinx and female students to enroll and how its relationships with companies and alumni are leading to a more inclusive industry.

Jeff Casimir, Turing School executive director:

A lot of tech companies, there's a gap between the culture they think they have and the culture they actually have. And when you're automatically on the outside, that gap can become really painful. There is a responsibility within the companies of course, to create inclusive cultures. And we can definitely steer students away from problematic places, but we can't control what happens in that company. So what we can do and we continue to work hard to develop is build the alumni support network. You might be the only person of color at your company. You might be the only woman at your company. You might be the only woman of color at your company, but you're not the only one in our community. And so if we can build and sustain those bonds, then people can find the support that they need. There might not be that exemplar person that you see when you go in for an interview, but you already know them.

Jeff Casimir, Turing School executive director:

They're already your mentor. When you were a student, you've already seen them, off at their third job, off at some fancy pad Silicon Valley company. They're the ones that can encourage you and support you and show you what can happen. And so right now, I think we're at 1,200 or 1,250 alumni. And that number is growing quickly. Almost every time somebody says like, "Hey, I'm thinking I really want to go work at this company." You can just look on LinkedIn and go, "Oh, here's two alums that work there, go talk to them." Go find that friendly advice, get the inside scoop, get the guidance and just keep building the network that way. Turing at its heart is about civil rights, right? Is blowing open the access doors to who is allowed to have these high quality careers where you get to do interesting work, work that matters you get paid well for it. You get treated well for it. I think for the vast majority of the tech industry's history, it's been a tightly selected group who gets to play on that playground.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Casimir admits that a lot of work, still needs to be done to make the tech industry look more like society.

Jeff Casimir, Turing School executive director:

At Turing now women make up between 30 and 40% of our student body. We're working over the next two years to try and push that up to 60%. About 25 to 30% of our students are people of color and trying to continue to grow that particularly black and Latinx students who are drastically underrepresented in the tech industry.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I talked with one woman who graduated from Turing School about how the program helped launch her tech career. Sage Lee is 26, she already had a degree in environmental policy management, but wanted to learn something that would give her some flexibility.

Sage Lee, Turing School graduate, software engineer:

I knew that eventually down the line, I wanted to have the option to maybe work for a company that was more environmentally minded because I still have sustainability as a passion of mine. And so I was trying to think of skills that I could gain that would allow me flexibility to move amongst many different companies. I found that if I learned to code almost every company has a website and almost every company needs some sort of engineer.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Sage Lee is a black woman, and she's very aware that there aren't many women or people of color in tech. When she was looking at the training, she needed to switch careers. It was important that the program be inclusive and lead to a job at an inclusive company.

Sage Lee, Turing School graduate, software engineer:

I've been in that place where I'm the only black person in the room. And so that definitely was intimidating. And I wanted to make sure that whichever route I took to get into coding was a really supportive community somewhere where I would have felt that I could build up that self-esteem, build up that confidence and make sure that I was going into the field feeling really confident about myself and my abilities.

Sage Lee, Turing School graduate, software engineer:

Something that I'm really grateful about Turing is that they're really open about their diversity and inclusion initiatives. And I believe that they had a lot of resources for me as a black woman, going into school, I was assigned a mentor and I had the option to request a woman of color as my mentor, as somebody that I could look up to and relate to. And I worked with her throughout my time at Turing. She wasn't black, but she's Latina. And she was great with me. So right from the bat, even before I started classes, I was assigned a mentor.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Lee got a degree in backend engineering in seven months that helped her land, a job as a software engineer apprentice at a company called Handshake. She found that job through a Turing network event.

Sage Lee, Turing School graduate, software engineer:

Once you graduate the programming and support that you have from Turing isn't finished, they have a whole finding your career path and schedule and continued events. So luckily you don't lose that support right after graduation. They really make you feel that like, we've taught you up until this point. You have the skills, you can do the job. Now you really just need to meet the people that are going to get you that job. Most of my focus was on networking and meeting as many people as I possibly could. I had a career coach that I met with once a week. I was meeting with my mentor once a week, even though I've only been there a little over a month now because of the support that I have from the team I'm working on the code base, I'm doing the actual work. And the skills that I learned at Turing are being put in place every day.

Sage Lee, Turing School graduate, software engineer:

I always had this idea in my head growing up that maybe I wasn't smart enough to go into computer science to be quite real. Usually I just see like white men. When I think of tech jobs, I think of Silicon Valley, I think of like Facebook. I think of Mark Zuckerberg. I think of the kind of people I think of in tech are white men. And that's how I've always thought about it growing up. And it was until just a year ago when I thought, "Hey, maybe I can do this."

Sage Lee, Turing School graduate, software engineer:

Honestly, it wasn't until I worked at a tech company, which I was working at before, Turing, where I realized, "Hey, I can do what these guys are doing." I could do with the guys down the hall or doing, just growing up it wasn't marketed to me like it seems to be for young boys and so. If maybe somebody that I knew in my life, maybe somebody in my family or somebody that I looked up to was in tech. Maybe I would've found it sooner. I wish I had known about a program like Turing when I graduated high school or even right after I graduated college. If I had known that it was as accessible as it is, I definitely would have made the shift.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You've been listening to a special edition of Work in Progress, expanding opportunities in tech, creating a more diverse and inclusive workforce. This series is produced in partnership with Cognizant U.S. Foundation for WorkingNation. I'm, Ramona Schindelheim. Thanks for listening.